

The priests move back as Philip and Isabella step through an open door and wave to the crowd below. Philip goes back inside. There is someone he must talk to. A priest steps forward. His name is Robert Reston. He is Philip's secret agent in England.

Philip puts his hand on Reston's shoulder. 'The time for our great adventure has come.'

CHAPTER 1

England's queen

Elizabeth sat with her ministers in Whitehall Palace. As usual, the conversation was about her safety – and the safety of England. Elizabeth was an attractive and unusual looking queen. Her pale face and long red hair caught people's attention – and when she spoke, people listened. The Queen of England was known for her intelligence and fairness. Catholics had less to fear with her as queen, than the Protestants had when Mary was queen. Elizabeth knew her people loved her.

Today, Elizabeth was becoming impatient with her ministers. 'The Catholics grow stronger every day,' one was saying. 'You need to be harder with them.'

Elizabeth didn't like being told what to do. 'I will not make windows into men's beliefs,' she replied. 'There is only one Jesus Christ. The rest is unimportant.'

The room went silent. Another minister spoke. 'We have news of plots to kill you, Majesty*,' he said. 'They come from the Spanish. They want to make Mary queen. While she lives, your life is in danger.'

'So now you want me to execute my own cousin?' Elizabeth turned to Walsingham, her main minister and

* Majesty is a polite way of speaking to a king or queen.

spymaster. 'Do you have proof that she is part of these plots?'

'Not yet, Majesty,' Walsingham replied.

'Well, until you do, remember this. She is our guest. You have to accept that.'



Far from London, a ship, the *Tyger*, had sailed into Dover*. Its captain was Walter Raleigh. Raleigh had returned from the New World** where he had discovered land for England. He wanted to go back there, but his ship needed some work first. And the queen had to allow him to sail there again. So he needed to see her.

'It won't be easy to get a meeting with her, sir,' said Calley, his assistant.

Raleigh smiled. Nothing was easy. But he'd had more success than most men. This would be no different.

'Fire the guns, Calley. Let England know we're back.'



* Dover is a town on the south coast of England.

** 'The New World' was the name European explorers gave to the Americas in the 16th century.

Elizabeth was on the River Thames in the royal boat, on her way to St Paul's Cathedral*. She loved being on the river and waving to the happy crowds who had come to see her.

But, even now, Walsingham wouldn't allow her to enjoy the journey. 'Your people want you to marry, Majesty. They have signed papers. I have the papers here.'

'I don't want to see them,' Elizabeth said. She didn't want to marry. She would not be such a strong leader if she was married, and the idea of having children frightened her.

'You can't wait forever,' Walsingham continued. 'You need a child of your own to rule when you die. And there's something else. If you marry a foreign prince, England will be stronger. The Spanish will have to fight two countries, not just one.'

Elizabeth turned to Bess Throckmorton, her favourite lady at court. Bess was young and beautiful. 'What kind of man would you like to marry, Bess?' Elizabeth asked.

Bess turned pink and smiled as she imagined a husband. 'Tall, with an open face and friendly eyes.'

'And nice legs,' added Elizabeth. 'A man must have nice legs.'

'Yes, and he mustn't eat with his mouth open,' Bess replied.

The two women were laughing. Walsingham was getting impatient. He wanted Elizabeth to be serious about marriage.

But his seriousness made Elizabeth laugh more. For a few moments at least, she didn't want to have to think about marriage, Mary, and murder plots.

Danger was closer than Elizabeth realised. Among the

* St Paul's Cathedral is London's biggest and most important church.

crowds was Anthony Babington, a secret agent who was working for Robert Reston. Reston wanted Babington to kill the queen.

'Are you afraid of being caught?' Reston had asked before giving him the job.

'No,' Babington had replied. 'If I'm caught I will die for our God. That is something I could never fear.'

Reston was happy with the answer. With men like this, his plan would be successful. A plan that would change the world.

CHAPTER 2

Enemies

Elizabeth usually enjoyed dancing, but this night, after the dancing ended, she felt sad. She felt tired too – and not young and attractive any more.

'Where did these lines around my mouth come from?' she asked as Bess took off her make-up that night.



'From laughing, Majesty.'

Laughing? When did Walsingham allow her to do that?

'I feel alone tonight, Bess.'

'You're not alone, Majesty. I'm with you. And the whole